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AUTHOR Becher, Rhoda McShane
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ABSTRACT

Three concepts critically important in developing curricula for young children are play, thinking/creativity, and sustained interest. Through play, children explore the world; practice discovered relationships; and establish meanings for concepts, words, ideas, and actions. Teachers should actively focus on the learning potential of play. Teachers' concepts of children's cognitive and creative development should also be broad enough to include a range of thinking activity levels and at least four basic dimensions of creativity. Specifically with respect to thinking, children are capable of knowledge acquisition/processing, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Ideational fluency, originality, flexibility, and elaborate thinking are dimensions of creativity that teachers can also increase, while they remain sensitive to differences in children's learning styles. A good curriculum is responsive to children's curiosity, develops and furthers their interest commitments, and introduces new areas of interest. These three important aspects of curricula for young children can be integrated in practice through the use of "webbing" and a project approach. Webbing, a process designed to organize children's brainstorming efforts, results in an integrated written record of the knowledge, processes, resources, and learning experiences/products associated with a given topic and provides a detailed basis for project development. (RH)

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I Know What I'm Doing, I Just Don't Know What to Call It

Rhoda McShane Becher, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

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For sometime now, educational programs for young children have been under increasing pressure to include more "academic learnings" in the curriculum and to focus on "achievement" at the expense of "play". Many teachers of young children are torn between their recognition of the intense interest and apparent importance of young children participating in play activities and the societal pressures to provide for "intellectual development and academic learning". Because there is a lack of understanding, on the part of many, of how these two apparently opposing concerns can be rectified, teachers of young children often plan programs which allow for "free play" in order to entertain or keep children happy, and "work time" in order to meet the demands for academic learning. Yet while this plan has proven "workable" there is often an underlying uneasiness as indicated by the fact that when asked what their curriculum is many teachers will answer by describing what they "teach" and secondly there is often an ongoing search for "another way" to respond to these concerns. What I would like to do today is to talk to you about three major integral concepts that I consider critically important in developing curricula for young children and then to describe and illustrate one way of practically integrating them.

In response to the continuous PUSH for "academics" and the corresponding emphasis on "facts" and "instruction" we need to pause and reflect on what we KNOW about young children, about their eagerness to learn, and about the ways in which they learn, and then respond to that PUSH in ways that indicate that one values the youngness of children and therefore the importance of maintaining or supporting the integrity of childhood--the noise, the activity level, the excitement of young children and the intensity with which they not only collect information but more

importantly how they organize that information, and make associations and interpretations.

As we think about and describe the special nature of young children it is really not their ability to count or name their colors or recite any number of other pieces of factual knowledge that delights us but rather the freshness and uniqueness of their observations and ideas. As an example of this point, I recently had the opportunity to overhear a young child of about 5 at a sporting event ask his father how long a meter was. The father responded "a meter is a little longer than a yard" to which the child responded "my yard or Jason's yard?"

In a similar vein, one of my favorite stories concerns a child of about two who was intensely watching his mother taking a bath and finally pointed to his mother's breast and asked "what's that?". The mother responded "that's a nipple"--to which the child replied "Bottle?". The mother then said "Sort of--when you were a little baby you did drink milk out of it" The child paused and thought for a moment and then pointed to the other breast and said "orange juice?".

The delight and joy in these and the many other stories each of you could tell about the young children you work with comes from this continuous and developing effort to KNOW and understand their world and the struggle to connect or integrate their knowledge rather than just remember it!

In developing curricula for young children that supports the unique special nature of young children, the integrity of childhood, and young children's innate efforts to organize, associate, and interpret information, we need to guard against the tendency to become solely subject matter oriented when we think of "curriculum" and to avoid compartmentalizing

play as an activity for entertainment rather than education. The first major concept that I consider absolutely crucial in developing a curriculum for young children is the concept of PLAY. We need to reemphasize the intense value and importance of PLAY and to reinstate play as the main vehicle for achieving educational and even "academic" goals.

Perhaps the most succinct description of the value or importance of play is provided by Scarfe (1962) in an article entitled "PLAY IS EDUCATION." Scarfe says:

> A child's play is his way of exploring and experimenting while he builds up relations with the world and with himself. In play he is learning to learn. He is also discovering how to come to terms with the world, to cope with life's tasks, to master skills. In particular he is learning how to gain confidence. In play a child is continually discovering himself anew....
>
> Play has, in fact, all the characteristics of a fine and complete educational process. It secures concentration for a great length of time. It develops initiative, imagination and intense interest. There is tremendous intellectual ferment, as well as complete emotional involvement. No other activity motivates repetition more thoroughly. No other activity improves the personality so markedly. No other activity calls so fully on the resources of effort and energy which lie latent in the human being. Play is the most complete of all the educational processes for it influences the intellect, the emotions, and the body of the child. It is the only activity in which the whole educational process is fully consummated, when experience induces learning and learning produces wisdom and character....
>
> Play is essentially a research activity--an adventure, an experiment, a transactional process. It is motivated by innate curiosity and inquiry. It is the expression of a child's urge to find out and discover for himself how to live, how to be. Play has the joy of discovery, the satisfaction of creativity.
>
> If play is thought of as a research activity, then it becomes a most important activity for children and the spirit of play a most important stimulus to mental activity for adults.

Play needs to be an integral part of the curricula we develop for young children because it is through "play" that the child explores his world, practices the relationships he has discovered, and establish meanings for concepts, words, ideas, and actions.

But in order for play to be part of the curricula teachers need to actively focus on the learning potential of play, to design environments that stimulate, support, and extend play, and to assume an active personal role regarding children's play behaviors by actively observing; adding or rearranging materials; adding information, language, and vocabulary; asking questions to extend or clarify the activity; becoming a participant; modeling play behaviors; suggesting alternatives for consideration; discussing what took place after the fact; comparing different ways of doing the same thing; describing the activities before the rest of the group; making written or pictorial records of the play activities; evaluating problems that occurred and especially the solutions that were proposed; discussing other ways of doing things that children might wish to try next time; helping children to plan what they might do; helping to bring about different combinations of players--in other words stimulating, guiding, valuing, extending, and enriching the expressed interests of children.

The second concept that is very important in developing curricula for young children is to provide extensive opportunities for stimulating the thinking process and creativity. In working with teachers from a variety of settings one of the most striking things I have observed is that when teachers are asked to describe how their program facilitates cognitive development, the majority of responses tend to be a recitation of the types of facts or the specific learning objectives the teachers have, such as--we teach the children to recognize their name; to say their address; to count to __; to name their colors; to know the names of the days of the week; to say the alphabet; to do one-to-one correspondence, and so forth. In a similar vein, when asked to describe how their program contributes to the development of creativity, the general response is to say that they always

have paints and crayons available and that they frequently plan art activities in which children might make a collage, or a puppet, or an Easter basket, or a hat or some other type of product. While these activities are not unimportant they represent only a rather narrow conception of cognitive development and creativity. Cognitive development includes a range of thinking activity levels that include (Bloom, 1956; Goodwin, et al., n.d.):

	Taxonomy	Student Activity	Questions Teachers Ask
1)	Knowledge	Remembering (previously learned material)	What is... ?
		Stating facts	Name...
		Giving definitions	(Define) What does____ mean? Can you tell me about _____?
		Describing concepts	
2)	Comprehension	Understanding the meaning of material--	(Explain) Can you tell me how...?
			(Summarize) Can you tell me what happened?
		Demonstrate by explaing in his own words or by citing examples	(Intrepret) What do you think that means?
			(Give examples) What are some of the things that are _____?
			(Predict) What do you think will happen next?
3)	Application	Using a concept or skill to solve a problem, answer a question or perform another task.	(Solve, construct) If we wanted to ____, what could we do?
4)	Analysis	Breaking down material and explaining relations	Why do you think ____ works?
			How are _____ alike, different?
5)	Synthesis	Producing something new	What else might we do with _____?
			What else can we make?

6)	Evaluation	Making a judgment based upon a set of criteria (own or others)	Why do you like _____ What is it that you don't like?

While the specific "terms" and "description" of each of these levels of thinking are far too advanced for young children to understand, they are more than able to engage in thinking at each of these levels and do so regularly on their own. I observed, for example, two young children "evaluating" which was better, the hamburgers you get at McDonald's or the hamburgers you get at Burger King. They finally decided that if you don't care what you get on your hamburger, McDonald's were better but if you only liked certain things then Burger King was better.

As another example, three young children engaged in considerable analyses and synthesis thinking as they discussed how to build a spaceship out of cardboard boxes. Comments were made regarding how much room they needed, what kinds of controls spaceships had, how spaceships were powered, and what materials they had available to use to make it. After completing the project they also "evaluated" their work by commenting how their ship was like a real spaceship and how it was different; what they were able to include and what things they weren't, and finally what they would do next time if they were to build another one.

In terms of stimulating creativity we also need to think about the meaning of creativity--that it is more than art--and to emphasize the breadth of opportunities for developing creativity or creative thinking in the curriculum. When we're talking about creativity or creative thinking there are four basic dimensions that should be considered:

Dimensions of Creativity

1. Fluency - the number of relevant ideas presented;
2. Originality - the uniqueness or uncommonness of ideas;
3. Flexibility - the ability to shift thinking, and accept and use new information as it becomes available;
4. Elaborate thinking - the abilty to add to what you or someone else has produced; it is the detail that flushes out a concept.

From both research and teaching perspectives there is a strong belief that random reinforcement of fluency or just getting people to be fluent in their thinking is not as effective a strategy as developing fluency or asking for more ideas in the context of a specific situation or a relevant problem. However, when fluency is emphasized in a relevant context, the number of relevant ideas can be greatly increased.

In terms of originality, Eleanor Duckworth said in an article entitled "The Having of Wonderful Ideas":

> Making new connections depends on knowing enough about something in the first place to be able to think of other things to do; of other questions to ask, which demand the more complex connections in order to make sense of it all. The more ideas a person already has at his disposal, the more new ideas occur, and the more they can coordinate to build up still more complicated schemes.

Thus while originality may be somewhat more difficult to affect than the other dimensions of creativity it can be influenced by providing both a range and especially a depth of rich experiencesand by encouraging children to think about their experiences collectively. Children can then be asked if they can come up with any new ideas.

Both flexibility and elaborate thinking are also skills that can be increased. By asking children to engage in this type of thinking with respect to the typical activities with which they become involved we can have an important influence on developing creativity in its broadest sense.

It is also especially important to recognize that as children engage in the creative/learning process they will illustrate different learning styles. Recognizing these different styles facilitate both our understanding of how different children learn as well as how we teach.

Leland Jacobs (1978) has identified two basic styles of learning which he has labeled "Splitters" and "Lumpers."

"Splitters" take ideas, hypotheses, questions, information and so forth and build logically, logically, logically to a conclusion. And generally when we think about planning curricular activities we do just this--we plan so that ideas, information, and activities build logically, logically, logically to some outcome.

"Lumpers" vary considerably from splitters however, in that they take an idea or lots of ideas or as Jacob's has said "they throw out a good gob of stuff" and then they play with them, pulling out strands, trying them in different ways to see how things work best. The conclusion comes only after considerable "messing about" time.

[By the way, if you're curious as to which you are, the test to determine this is what you did when you wrote a term paper. If you were asked to turn in an outline with your paper and you wrote the outline and then wrote the paper you're a splitter. If instead, you wrote the paper and then found out what the outline was you're a lumper.] Interestingly, in three early childhood audiences to whom I addressed this question, there were far more "Lumpers" than "Splitters".

The point of this exercise is that we approach our learning tasks very differently--and we have difficulty when we try to fit into the other style. Because of this we need to look at our efforts in curriculum development in terms of the opportunities it provides for <u>both</u> "splitters" and "lumpers" to develop knowledge and thinking skills.

In summarizing this point regarding curriculum development for young children, we should always keep in mind that mere accumulation or storage of facts does not make for intelligence. Computers store facts extraordinarily well and while there is considerable work going on regarding the creation of artificial intelligence, computers are not considered intelligent. Instead, intelligence or cognition is the use of knowledge in gaining understanding and in furthering knowledge; this is of upmost importance and the area to which we must give major attention when developing a curriculum.

The third and last concept that I would like to discuss before pulling these ideas together in a very specific practical way of integrating them in curriculum development for young children is interests and commitments. There is probably universal agreement that learning occurs most easily by anyone when they are interested in what they are learning. But interests vary in intensity and when this dimension is explored one finds that while activities are made "interesting" there is an extremely important aspect of interests which is given almost no attention by curriculum developers and this is the notion of commitment--the development of sustained interest and the corresponding higher levels of knowing that accompany it.

Children (and adults for that matter) exhibit three basic kinds of interests:

1) Interest curiosities - (Jacobs, 1978) which means that they want to know some things about some things, to work on an activity for a little while, to know about certain things.
2) Interest commitments - (Jacobs, 1978) Interest commitments are those in which the person becomes absorbed in them at the time or they keep returning to the topic/activity over time,

they are seriously interested in KNOWING not just knowing about certain things--and while their absorption may not last a very long time, it is the intensity with which they engage themselves with the ideas or activities that is apparent.

3) Unknown interests - You can't be interested in things about which you know nothing about or about which you have not had experience. And yet there are many many topics about which children will develop interest curiosities and/or interest commitments once they have had some exposure.

Taking these types of interests together, it becomes apparent that a good curriculum needs to be able to respond to interest curiosities, to develop and further interest commitments (especially because these are the areas in which children will be able to develop the longest attention spans and the most highly developed complex thinking abilities) and to introduce new areas of interest to children.

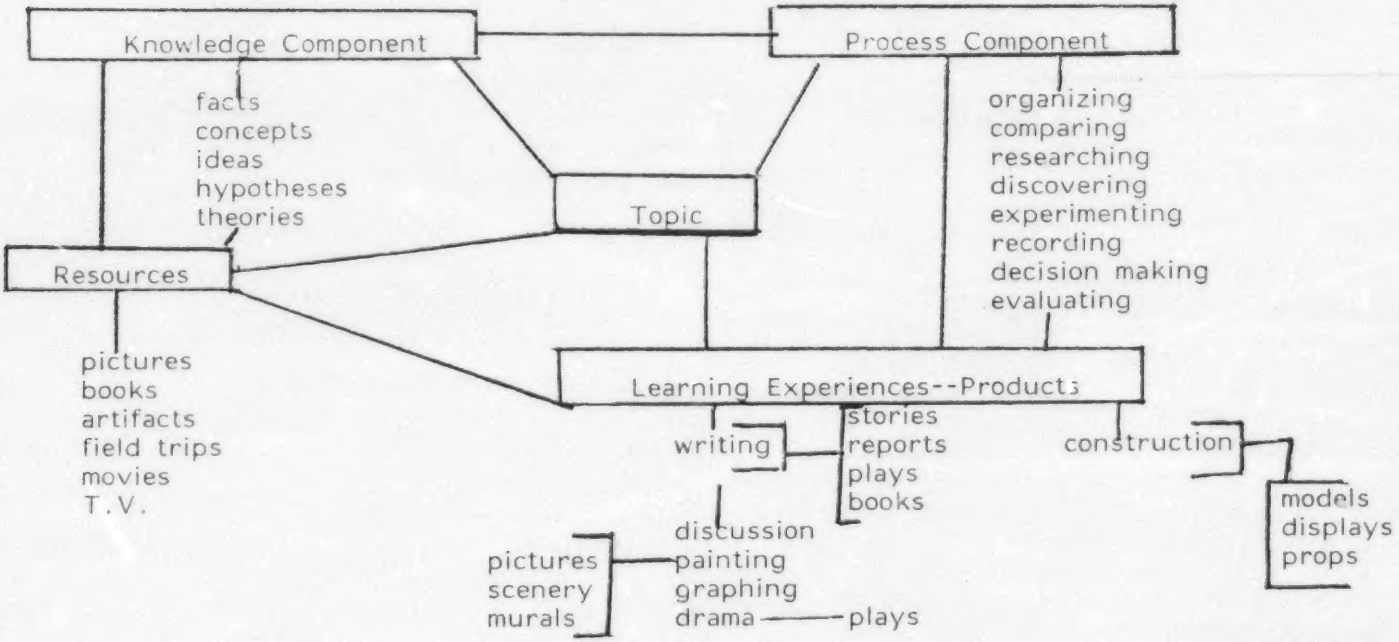
One way of supporting the importance of play in young children's learning, of stimulating higher level and expanded thinking skills and creativity, and of utilizing and developing children's interests particularly interest commitments is to make use of Webbing and the Project Approach to curriculum development. As the name suggests, a Project Approach to curriculum development is an emphasis on the development of projects--that is, long term, related, involved, integrated activities around a given interest area. That interest area may be a theme in dramatic play, it may be construction activities in the block center, it may be work with peg boards, or it may concern topic areas like "football," or "outer space," or any number of other interests children express.

Webbing is a form of organizing brainstorming efforts that you do with the children. It's purpose is to expose what you already know and to broaden the way that you think about a topic. It allows a wide range of ideas to be introduced both by children and by the teacher; it provides a plan of where you can go with the development of an idea; it unfolds potentials and promise and provides an integrated direction; it also presents a multitude of choices--and thus the inclusion of more participants. It is important to note, however, that the process is appropriate for a single individual as well as for a small or larger group. It is also important to note that some children will view the process of creating a web as all they wish to do (interest curiosities) while others will do some things and others will become totally immersed (interest commitments). Again, while this process does not always produce interest commitments (and really shouldn't be thought of as always needing to) it does present, encourage, and facilitate that development to a far greater extent than many other approaches. It also has the benefit of being a very rapid way of exploring the possibilities of a topic and assessing the intensity of interest without the investment of time that is required in the preparation of teaching units.

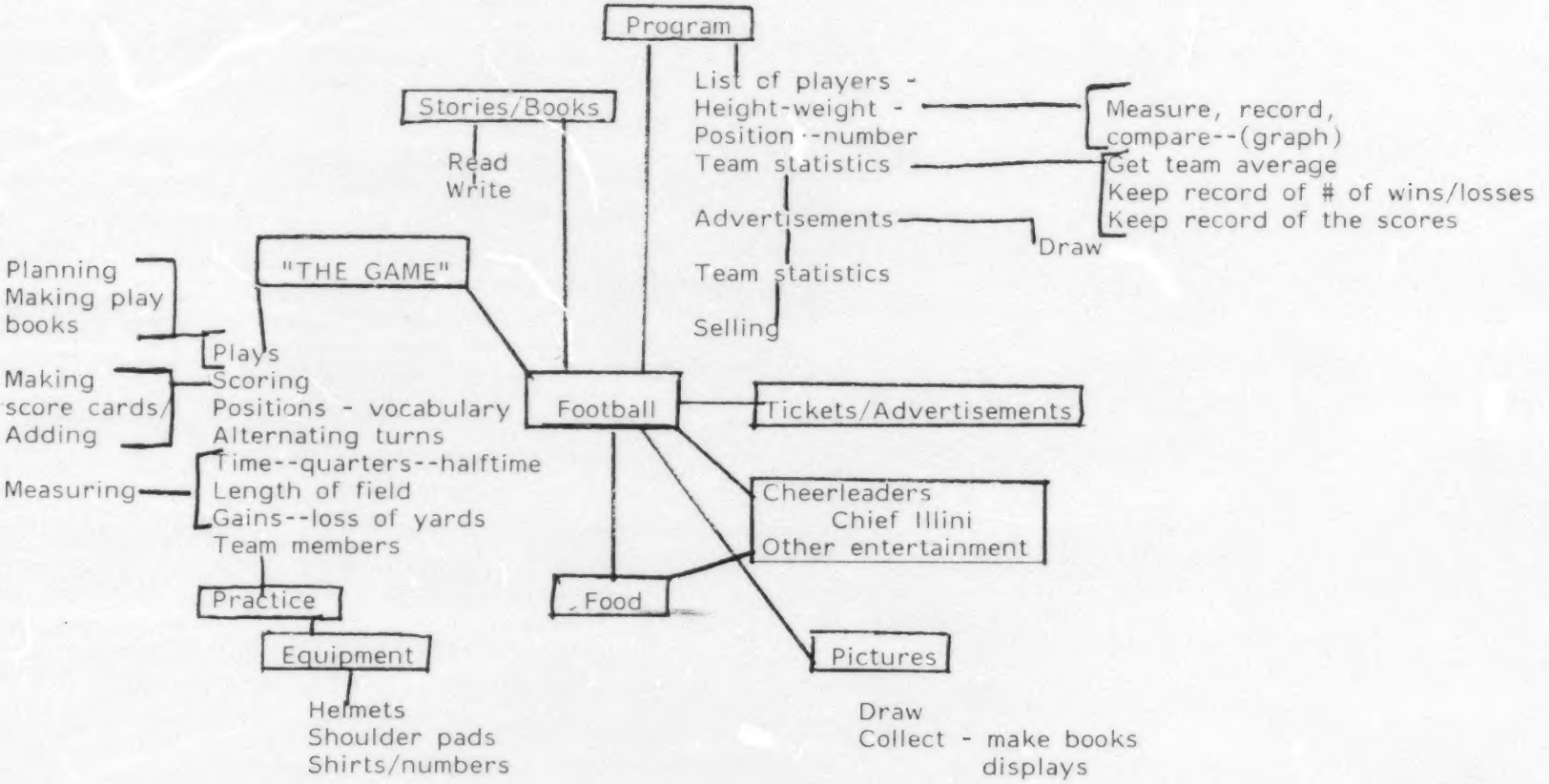
In developing a web you begin by indentifying your topic area and then free associating/brainstorming what you know about the topic. You can then break off those areas of greatest interest and brainstorm what things you could do with the topic. As you do this, the written record of ideas begins to branch and connect and form a web--an integrated, connected picture of the knowledge, processes, resources, and learning experiences or products associated with a given topic.

The following examples illustrate the major aspects of a project approach to curriculum development using webbing, and two "webs" created with children. Descriptions of the projects developed from these webs will follow.

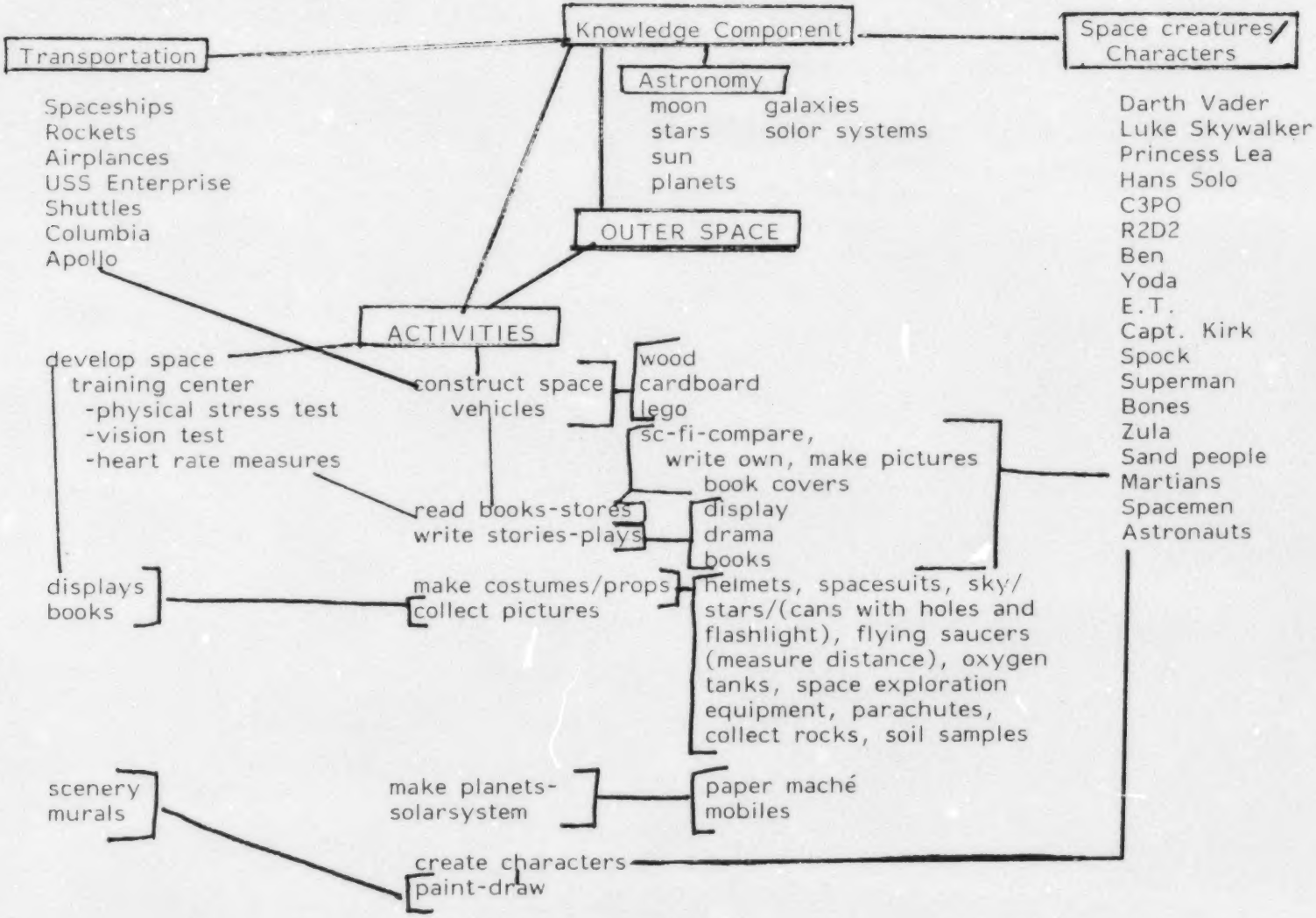
Major Aspects of a Project Approach to Curriculum Development Using Webbing



An example of a webbing:



An example of a webbing:



The "Football" Project was developed in a kindergarten class and serves as an excellent example of how children's interests are sometimes discounted but which can be developed into an extraordinary learning activity. When the children returned to school after the Christmass--New Year's holidays, a number of the boys were caught-up with the idea of football. They talked about the games they had seen on T.V. with their fathers/parents and they started playing football games at recess. The interest in the games and recess kept building. While in class the children spent a great deal of time talking about what they were going to do at recess or what actually happened at the game. The teacher was finding herself reminding children to get back to their activities when she suddenly realized she was ignoring real interest and decided to initiate the "Football" Project. The "web" that was created was not all created at once, different parts of it were added as the project developed and as children's interests continued and their knowledge expanded.

The part that was developed first, as would be expected, was "The Game". The teacher began helping children find out more about the game, the positions involved, the types of play, yardage gained or lost, and scoring. The children formed teams, held practice, planned strategies, and kept records of wins and losses. After a week or so they decided that they needed equipment. They made helmets out of the bottoms of plastic milk bottles, numbers for their shirts, and shoulder pads also were of the milk bottles bottoms. They began reading books about football, drawing pictures about football, and writing/dictating their own stories. One day the idea of a program was introduced and this began a new phase of the project--weighing and measuring the players, finding out which team weighed more and which was taller, reporting team statistics, and

finally designing the cover and the advertisements. During this time the children decided that they wanted to put on the game for the parents. A time and date were set, advertisements developed, tickets made. Then the need for cheerleaders, half-time entertainment, and food concessions became apparent. Other children became interested and joined the project to develop these new aspects. The children spent about two months in developing this project; the culminating activity--the BIG GAME, lasted about 15 minutes.

The interest was intense during the entire time the project was in operation; the cognitive, creative, language, physical, and social learning were enormous and identifiable, and yet children were "playing".

In contrast to the Football Project where the web developed as the project developed, the Outer Space web was created almost in its entirety at the intial session. At this point the project is still in process and some aspects of the web have not yet been initiated (and some may never be). The children decided that they wanted to write a space adventure play and travel through the solar system. They have made paper-maché planets to scale, built spaceships (I referred to this earlier when describing analysis, synthesis, and evaluation thinking skills), made space suits and oxygen tanks, and have written extensive stories, drawn numerous pictures and read many, many books. They are now in the process of beginning to write the play. Once written there may be the need for more costumes, more scenery, more props, "rehearsals", advertisements, tickets, programs, and so forth.

Again, the interest is intense and while "the play" is still to be developed, the informal dramatic play activities have been rich, extensive, elaborate, and wonderfully varied.

In conclusion I would like to reiterate the importance we all recognize of early childhood as special, unique, definable time in the development of children and the need to continue to value the integrity of childhood and the youngness of children. We can never teach children all that could be learned so the challenge that we face is finding the content and the means of teaching young children that encourages them to go on with learning. To this point Jimmie Hymes has said (1981) "Narrow schools..set the three R's as the limit of their task. Good schools teach the three R's but do it in such a way that children carry away the three L's: each child's love of one's self, love for other people, and love of learning."

In thinking about some of the ideas that I have presented, as well as the work we do each day with children, we come back to the title of my presentation "I Know What I'm Doing, I Just Don't Know What to Call it." As I was deciding upon the title of this talk, I shared it with a number of early childhood educators who said that they feel like that a lot of the time. I've decided though that I should change the name now so that is says "I Know What I'm Doing And I Do Know What to Call It --it's called a Commitment to Children--a commitment to developing their promise by teaching them how to learn not what to learn, a commitment to their overall future well-being, and a reaffirmation of my commitment to the special unique time called childhood.

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